

BETHANY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT



Board of Education

Janet Finneran, Co-Chair
Brian Fournier, Co-Chair
Maura Harrigan, Secretary
Laura Adair
Salvatore Amadeo
Ronna Brier
Christopher Pittenger
Dominick Reis
Mary Sofair

Timothy F. Connellan, Superintendent
Mary Federico, Upper School Housemaster
Robert Spino, Lower School Housemaster

Greetings from the Bethany Board of Education!

We have decided to distribute this newsletter from time to time during the year to parents and staff of the Bethany Community School (BCS), in an effort to open up communication between the Board and members of the community. We hope this will be a two-way street, as we continue to hear about residents' concerns through our regular Board meetings, Committee meetings, the superintendent and school administration, and the PTO.

This first letter from the Board is being sent in both paper and electronic format, to reach as many members of the BCS community as possible. We will distribute future communications using the school's email distribution list. If you are not currently on that list, you can get added by contacting Tammy Velleca (tvelleca@bethany-ed.org). You can also request paper copies of future letters, though we encourage people to receive them electronically, to save resources.

Who are the members of the Bethany Board of Education (BOE)? The nine members of the BOE are elected to six-year terms, with several members standing for election every two years. The Board is led by two Co-Chairs, who convene meetings and work with the Superintendent to set their agenda. Some members of the Board are parents with students in the school; others are not. All are Bethany residents and taxpayers.

What does the Board do? The BOE sets policy for the school and oversees its operation. The BOE does not run the school on a day-to-day basis; that is the job of the Superintendent, the Housemasters, and the rest of our excellent professional staff. Rather, we set policy and goals, negotiate contracts, work with the Superintendent to develop the budget each year, and in general oversee the administration to ensure that the school is run well.

When and where does the Board meet? The Board meets once a month, typically on the second Wednesday (there is a schedule of meeting dates on the BCS website). Meetings are in the Media Center area of the school library. From time to time, additional meetings are scheduled to address particular issues that require extra time or special attention, such as the development of the budget each year. Special meetings are posted at the Town Clerk's office, in the Superintendent's office, at the school and on the BCS website.



What is discussed at meetings? The Superintendent and Board Co-Chairs develop the agenda for each meeting about a week in advance. The agenda is posted in the Town Clerk's office, in the Superintendent's office, at the school and on the BCS website. Meeting minutes are posted on-line, generally shortly after the following month's meeting.

Who can attend BOE meetings? BOE meetings are open to the public. There are rare exceptions to this for 'executive session', when confidential issues (like specific personnel matters) need to be discussed.

Can I speak at BOE meetings? There are 'public comment' times set aside at the beginning and end of each BOE meeting for comment from anyone who wishes to speak. This represents a very valuable way for us to hear concerns from community members about issues of school policy. Comments are generally limited to three minutes per person, in the interest of keeping the meeting moving.

What issues can I bring up? The most productive use of this time is to address issues of school policy and to bring things to the Board's attention – either complimentary or concerning – that may influence policy. Concerns about individual students, staff members, and such are often best taken up with classroom teachers, the Housemasters, or other members of the staff (such as the school nurse), who are in a better position to address them than the Board as a whole.

What will the response be? In general there is not a discussion of issues raised during the public comment session. This is because (i) the meeting is constrained by the agenda set in advance; (ii) a detailed and precise response to issues raised may not be possible immediately and may require some research and discussion by the administration and the Board; and (iii) Board meetings generally have a lot of ground to cover, and the schedule does not permit lengthy discussion of things not on the agenda. All issues raised in the public comment session are carefully noted, however, and will be followed up by the Superintendent or in a later meeting of the appropriate Board committee or of the full Board.

How about the rest of the meeting? Other than the public comment periods at the beginning and end of the meeting, visitors are not able to participate in the Board meeting. Again, this is because of the need to make it through a lengthy agenda efficiently.

How else can I contact the Board? All Board members' emails are posted on the website. Inquiries, requests, or suggestions can also be sent via the Housemasters or the Superintendent's office; all contact information is available on the web and in various papers sent home from the school. In many cases, the administration can address your questions directly and efficiently; in others, when appropriate, they can be added to the Board's agenda for the next meeting.

What are the Board committees? The details of many issues that the Board deals with are delegated to specific committees, each consisting of a few Board members. Specific



committees include Finance, Transportation, Curriculum, Negotiations, Facilities, Policy, and Communication; the Board can create new ‘ad-hoc’ committees if needed to address particular issues that arise. Committee meetings are posted in the Town Clerk’s office, in the Superintendent’s office, at the school and on the BCS website and are open to the public, though like full Board meetings they generally need to stick to a posted agenda.

What are the Board’s priorities this year? A central priority is, of course, to keep the school operating smoothly – and improve it – in a financially difficult time. We will send out a follow-up letter in a few weeks, detailing some of the choices the Board is weighing to establish a responsible budget for the next school year.

In addition, the Board sets Operational Goals each summer, outlining our priorities for the coming year. These Goals are posted on the school website. This year, the seven goals are (in brief):

- **Restructuring of the Finance Committee**, to make the budgeting process more streamlined and transparent, and to improve communications with the town’s Board of Finance.
- **Supporting the development of the new enrichment program**, which was instituted in the current school year and represents the realization of a long-held goal.
- **Refocusing the facilities plan**, taking stock of the current school facilities and how to improve them to meet student needs.
- **Reviewing the Housemaster organizational structure of the school.**
- **Reviewing the current compensation structure of the Superintendent.**
- **Improving communication with the BCS community.**
- **Regularly reviewing these Goals**, to make sure that ongoing management of the School is in line with our stated principles.

We hope that this first letter will clarify what the Board is and what we do. We plan to send another letter in a few weeks, outlining the Board’s thinking as we put together a budget proposal for next year.

Sincerely yours,

Christopher Pittenger
Laura Adair

Bethany Board of Education, Communications Committee
For the Bethany Board of Education